

Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Davis

Committee on Government Reform Field Hearing – Boston, MA

*“Digging Up the Facts: Inspecting the Big Dig and the
Performance of Federal and State Government in
Providing Oversight of Federal Funds”*

April 22, 2005

Good afternoon. A quorum being present, the Committee on Government Reform will come to order. We are conducting this field hearing in Boston today to assess the status of the Central Tunnel/Artery Project, or the “Big Dig,” one of the largest and most expensive federal highway projects in the history of the United States. My colleague and good friend and a member of this committee, Congressman Steve Lynch, requested that this Congressional committee convene a hearing here in Boston to witness first-hand the steps being taken to address the outstanding concerns and issues, in terms of safety and cost, associated with the Big Dig.

As this project nears completion, it is vital that we assess the lessons learned here in Boston and determine how to prevent such cost growth and improve oversight and coordination in the future. These are significant areas of concern to the Government Reform Committee, and indeed to the entire nation, as we seek solutions to increased urban congestion throughout the country. It is imperative for the federal government, which often pays 80 percent of major highway projects, to play a role to ensure taxpayer dollars, whether federal or state, are being used effectively. In addition, the increase in the number of projects and the rapidly growing competition for both federal and state funding demand that major transportation and infrastructure projects be managed efficiently and cost effectively so we are able to fund the many needs across our nation.

It is for these important reasons that we decided to come to Boston today and hold this important hearing. I am pleased that Congressman Lynch is with us this morning, and I would also like to welcome Congressman Capuano, representing the Eight Congressional District.

I don’t need to remind anyone here about the traffic and related highway safety problems of the Central Artery in the 1980’s that led to the planning for this massive project. Preliminary designs began in the 1980s and construction commenced in 1991. As with all state highway projects such as this, the Federal Highway Administration is responsible for protecting the federal funding of the project. As a part of the Metropolitan Highway System, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority was given construction and operational authority for the project.

The figures associated with the Big Dig are staggering - the nature and scope of the project, the time involved in planning and construction, and the cost overruns and safety concerns are unparalleled. What began in 1980 as a \$2 billion project grew to \$8 billion in 1995 and the Authority currently estimates the project cost to be \$14.625 billion. Upon completion, scheduled for later this year, the project will encompass 7.8

miles of highway with 161 lane miles of pavement, 3 interstate tunnels, over 200 bridge structures and 6 major interchanges.

While it is hard to imagine another federally funded public works project of this magnitude, there is a growing need nationwide to plan, build and support major highway and infrastructure improvements.

It is therefore vital for us to learn from what has happened here in Boston and implement procedures that will ensure against cost overruns of highway projects and assure the safety and confidence of the traveling public that utilizes those highways.

Certain steps have already been undertaken as a result of the problems associated with the Big Dig. Congress now requires initial financial plans and annual updates to be submitted and approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation for all projects costing \$1 billion or more. These financial plans for "Mega Projects" must identify project costs and financial resources to implement and complete the planned project. Annual updates must report actual cost and revenue performance in comparison to original estimates and revision of estimates.

This process has been implemented in the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project, which is the Potomac River crossing between Northern Virginia and Maryland. It is on schedule and under budget.

I hope that this hearing will give us an accurate picture of the current status of the Big Dig and the efforts to remedy the tunnel leaks, what has been learned from this mega-highway project, and implementation of safeguards for other federally funded projects.

We have assembled an impressive group of witnesses for this afternoon's hearing. We will hear from the Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Attorney General, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, the overall management consultant for the project hired by the Massachusetts Highway Department, and a safety engineer who evaluated the project.

I would like to thank all of our witnesses for appearing before the Committee, and I look forward to their testimony. I now yield to Mr. Lynch for his opening statement.